Ray Rinaldi

Comes a Time One Must React

My biggest laugh of the month came this past Tuesday with the publishing of the weekly newspaper, the Carbondale News, and in particular, its editorial, titled, "Fact . . . not fiction."

In case you missed it, the editorial slammed "one publication . . ." for carrying a story about Mayor Mancuso's impending resignation, and said, ". . . while another (publication) heavily suggested that so many changes were going to happen in City Hall that it would make people's heads spin."

The editorial then went on to preach the difference between "editorializing" and the printing of news, "factual accounts of events that have occurred." My definition of the word "news" is somewhat different, but let that pass. The editorial continued that if the mayor doesn't resign, "some local journalists will look pretty foolish." And if this should happen, ". . . that may hurt the Fourth Estate's credibility with area readers."

It took me a while to stop laughing. Heaven help us if some of us should be made to look foolish! For the record, that "one publication" is the Carbondale Mirror. That other "publication" is The Tribune/Scrantonian, specifically, yours truly. We have to spell it out because Phil Heth, owner and publisher of the Carbondale News, who I assume is responsible for the content of his newspaper and its editorial page, doesn't like to refer to the other newspapers by name in print. It's always, "the other weekly newspaper," or, "the morning newspaper," as if people would not be able to figure out which paper was the other weekly and which paper is the morning paper.

There is no reporter in Carbondale, working for any newspaper, who need worry about winning the Pulitzer Prize for journalism. That includes yours truly and Mr. Heth. And to pontificate that we who cover the news locally would ". . . hurt the Fourth Estate's credibility with area readers," is indeed incredible. I believe the Fourth Estate would survive some errors in journalism by yours truly or anyone else.

To get back to the editorial by Mr. Heth. Before he starts casting stones or preaching the basics of journalism from his ivory tower he'd better open a dictionary. Perhaps Paul Starzer, editor and publisher of the Carbondale Mirror, will send him one for Christmas. Mr. Heth, read the first paragraph of your lead story on the front page of the same edition as the editorial we're talking about. As you can see, we all make mistakes. And your editor, whose byline appears on the story, and whose job it is to "edit," might look up the meaning of another word used in a front page story of the same edition. The difference between trellis and trestle. We all make mistakes.

Concerning the possible resignation of Mayor Fred Mancuso, Mr. Heth suggests in his editorial that the Mirror erred in reporting, under the byline of Nan Waters, that the Mayor was going to resign. The editorial asked, ". . . has he said officially he has quit and made that a statement of fact in writing?"

When the Mayor tells you he is going to resign, that's news. I would suggest that you don't have to ask him to put it in writing. He is telling you, "I am going to resign," which is what he told Mrs. Waters in a telephone interview and which she reported. From that simple statement by the Mayor you don't have to "assume" anything, or print any "rumors" or "innuendo" or "gossip." The man said he was going to resign. Do you believe him, or do you call him a liar? Mrs. Waters chose to believe what he said.

I'm not attempting to defend Mrs. Waters or The Mirror since neither she nor the newspaper which employs her needs me to defend them. They're quite capable of doing that themselves, which I'm sure they will, but Mr. Heth's editorial drew this correspondent into it, and I will respond to it.

All the talk about the Mayor's resigning from office was initiated by the Mayor himself, or came from his "official" family in City Hall, or from members of his immediate family in several local business places. The Mayor said, publicly, on more than a dozen occasions, "I intend to resign."

Rumor? Innuendo? Gossip? Buffalo bagels! If he chooses to change his mind about resigning that is his prerogative, but don't go about accusing this paper or this correspondent of printing "gossip."

What I write for my Sunday column, under my byline, are stories that I believe my readers will find interesting. What appears in the daily paper, under my byline, are stories I have researched to either prove or disprove before writing them. If I make a mistake, which I sometimes do, I'll apologize for it, but I do not fabricate stories out of whole cloth merely for the sake of filling up space. Neither am I going to stick my head in the sand and pretend that everything is just peachy-keen in town. It isn't. And I certainly don't need Mr. Heth, or his editor, David Baum, to instruct me in how to investigate or write a story. I am only too well aware of both Mr. Heth's and Mr. Baum's investigative precedures and writings.